

THIS CIVILIZATION...

By the Same Author

FLOWER OFFERINGS (*Out of print*)

Armando Menezes—There is a singular wistfulness about this poetry which endears it to me.

Edmund Blunden—They have given me pleasure as the expression of your sensitive reflections.

K. S. Ramaswami Sastri—Your poems are short swallow flights of a tuneful soul & attract me much.

D. Kilham Roberts—Your very charming collection of prose poems which I am reading with the greatest interest.

Sukumar Dutt—You have vision & emotion and gift of expression of your own. If they mature with years, you will be able to give rare things to literature.

Julian Huxley—The task you have set yourself of writing in English is a difficult one, but the result justifies the effort.

SONGS OF A WANDERER

Louis Cazamian, LL. D.—I congratulate you sincerely upon your early achievement and promise.

Yone Noguchi—Your fancy is delicate, your imagery is graceful and your music is soft. Your book gives me a beautiful moment of youthfulness.

Laurence Binyon, LL. D.—You have tender and true touches and something a lovely image.

Mulk Raj Anand—Your poems are lovely and sensitive, and, I feel, you have a delicate and tender vision.

Edmund Blunden—Their world is a relief from the dark and sullen day outside.

NEW BOOK COMPANY

THIS CIVILIZATION...

By

P. R. KAIKINI

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TO
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

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INSTEAD OF A PREFACE

“**H**ERE in England we are accustomed to think of Indian poetry as being introspective and mystical; we seldom find in it a delight in the vivid diversity of the outer world, or an intense sympathy for other people, or those ingenious comparisons and contrasts which are part of the English poetic tradition. Your work, I think, differs from most of the Indian poetry that I have seen: it looks out at the world of science, politics and everyday affairs, and it expresses a passionate sense of right and wrong. At the same time you do not lose the inward vision; your poetry is born, I believe, of a struggle between the two, and I think that such a struggle is typical of India today...”

—MICHAEL ROBERTS

18.xi.36.

Newcastle upon Tyne 2.

THIS CIVILIZATION...

WE are bribed to breed
God's men like cattle or horses or dogs
On high purpose, with a plan, a design.
From the moment they bellowed their first cry and
Announced their triumphant entry into the world
They have sucked wine and blood and T-N-T.
Ever since they crawled about on their tottering
knees
They have gazed with wonder on balistrarias
The rifle and the bullet have interested them more
Than did caterpillars and cocoons interest
Pasteur or Fabre.
They delight in riding miniature tanks
(The fatal tricycles and scooters they'd fain blow off)
And on Sundays parade uniformed and gunned
In a perfect-ordered phalanx
Through the principal city thoroughfares
Under the glad-fieri eyes of a strong-weak Mr X.

Early or late
They stoop to national fate
To their God-ordained destiny.
They embrace the arms and kiss the bomb
To free men who are slaves to men
They war with war to bring peace to the race of
man.

Their shell and shrapnel rock the chosen land
And cleave the fair virgin soil
With wedges of fire and rancour and desolation
Sow seeds of flashing steel and stinking decomposition
Befoul the wells and rivers with human blood
Making free unasked gifts of waste, waste, waste,
Of ravaging decay, of eating, dark disease.

Their clamouring bombing planes
Dominate the dusky sky like locusts
Before them is a tender, smiling heaven
Behind them a blown-up battered hell,
Their batteries (masked and unmasked)
That are the clarion-call to peace and civilization
Unnerve and shock the alleged unmoral
Black aborigines
Murder in cold blood their women and children
And bury them alive
Under the dead weight
Of the ancient, glorious, discoloured civilization.
The victims' dying wish is
They were Roman galley-slaves at least !

CONTINUITY

OUT of
the drowning and deepening empty spaces
leaps forth a mad hungry flame
lusty and enraged,
pursuing innocent desire
to the edges of the earth
seduces and devours her.....

Impassioned sighs and sounds
dim and die down,
the fire subsides and smoulders,
the fury of the winds is no more,
the dawning day
binds two vagrant rebel souls
by the gentle invisible bands of mating
to an eternal union.....

And man casts his wondering eyes
on this throbbing, scene-shifting world.

THE DONKEY

HE wanders over the wild countryside
A reckless rake,
His feet proudly treading
The snug familiar ground.

Sometimes he remembers
And struts, remembering his ancestral glory
Upon the cold still hill
Under whose shady depths rests perchance an
unknown king or clown.

Sometimes, he forgets
And lingers and loiters long
Over the unenchanted unbounded plain
The holy sepulchre of Akbars and Alexanders.

Often he dreams—
And hears the bells and the flutter of leaves,
Sees in a flash
The sumptuous splendour of his buried days.

Oftener he wakes, the wretch—
And carries sand and stone,
wood and water
man and woman
Snarling under the relentless whip
He swears as he trudges along the ever-winding way
He curses, curses all the way.

QUETTA (1935)

THE flaming wheels of Shiva's Timeless chariot
Lurch in one insignificant fraction of an earthly
minute
Over a fortified city, a sea of slumbering humanity—
The tallest tower and bourgeois' house and pauper's
slum
Are rocked to their doom and final extinction.

Maybe a man lay dreaming of his woman
Maybe a babe was sucking at its mother's breasts
Maybe a dancing girl was performing before her
visitors
Maybe an infirm beggar lay on the cold footpath
awake with hunger,
Now Quetta is a common catacomb for these all.

I smell death's poison in the air—
The chaos of debris shows
A grey head here and there a pair of battered feet
Here's a sinister, lurid face turned dark:
Two socketless eyes, minus nose and left ear
No shoulders, no trunk, no legs!

At last the salvage begins,
They bear on the stretchers
Dead and half-dead men,
There goes one whose eyes are rolling like a windmill's
wings
His heart is all a flutter,
His soul seems too much smothered to live again
Too much bled for human tears to be shed!

THE HAUNTED BEACH

THERE'S an old half-crumbled tomb
beside the unfrequented beach of the sea :
no man is known to loiter there
long after sun-down.

A queer music animates the cold midnight air
the leaves start in wild ecstasy as in a storm,
flickering flames leap out from each branch ...

Opens on a sudden the plastered lid, and
three transparent gigantic figures emerge,
their eyes are burning molten gold
their ears withered palm-leaves
their lips scarlet with deadly potion.

One evening I cast my anchor
in the offing of the self-same sea
at the exact hour the trees shook madly
and revealed three demons dancing in a ring
their victim lay at their feet a bundle of broken bones,
a yell, a roar—
and the moon shone merrily as before
on the quiet beach.

I met a girl in the adjoining village :
she was waiting for her father
to come home across the sea.....

NEW LIFE — ONE VERSION

I AM glad you have come...
Come, join me at the table
For afternoon tea...
Ah, kiss me your old love again
Let us live in peace and concord...
If the sun and the moon
Can stay in the firmament together for ever
Why can't you and I
Live our short remnant of life under one roof ?
We will sail home after supper
You and I alone under the full moon to-night
And live our life anew
In a small cosy cottage
In the heart of an enchanted isle.

NEW LIFE — ANOTHER VERSION

HERE I am
in my new house
living my *new* life.

Overlooking my uncurtained window
are the mountains, cliffs and valleys
the wind blows over my garden walls
grey smoke lifts slowly from the city mills
the storm shakes my house by night,
grey mists obstruct my view by day —
the clouds fly over my new brown tiles
in endless succession of shifting shadows
as of yore.

But you, ah my love,
your electric eyes
your raven waving hair
your soft almond hands
your face panoplied with smiles
your lips, your lips I knew so well
your body that would have made
a perfect model for a native Epstein,
these I miss evermore.

My *new* life is equal
to the old one minus you! my *new* life !

YOU AND I

MY eyes are the expansive halcyon pond
In which your beauty is locked like a moon.

Your voice is the wild forest song,
My ears the wind that bears it far and wide.

My dreams are the trees
And you the shapely shadows they cast.

Your body is the barge on Life's boisterous seas
My soul the boatman ferrying to the Unknown Shore.

RELATIVITY

I ROWED my tiny boat
To dark No-land
Where No-one holds unquestioned sway.

There are no men there
And if there were, would be no better
Than mortar or clay.

But the wind has a human voice
And trees have living limbs
Stones can walk and run and dance
The houses are builded in the void—
or rather *not* builded.

Our brains very much resemble
The cotton that grows wild there.

Our throbbing grieving loving hearts
Are as good as a dead frog in the mire.

Our night and day and wind and rain
Have no meaning there.

Out eternity has no place on their time-scale
Our men are mere nothings in dark No-land.

SLAUGHTER-HOUSE

THE burning mid-day sun
Darkens the powdered face of a young woman
Who rides in a hack victoria
Down the asphalt street.

A half-nude leper
Squatting on the footpath beside the lotus-lake
Giggles and grunts and grunts and giggles
And salaams you, spreading his dissolving hand
For a stray copper.

The hired herdsmen
Drive a motley crowd of sheep and cattle
Lead four hundred earnest pattering hooves
Four hundred dancing, hurrying hooves
To the tin-shed from where they return no more!

RENDEZVOUS

AT full gallop I rode
Dressed in my newest garment
To the far-off unpeopled forest
Beyond the humming town.

But how frail was your body
How faint my throbbing heart
Our love was already tainted with tears
And our souls lay shrouded in death's gloom.

LOVE

IT is not love
That you whisper to your girl
Sing in a serenade
Or write in a perfumed letter.

Your stale breath
Wooden words
Insinuating eyes
(Of "fair speechless messages" fame)
Stink of sheer greed
Of nude lust
Passion intriguing with passion
Flesh plotting against flesh
Body betraying body
Hunger feeding hunger.

That is how you love !

RAIN-CLOUDS

BORN on high
Borne by winds
Over deep oceans
Landwards

Light-fleecy
Dapple-perfect
Full-pregnant
Slow-sailing

Mountain-tumbled
Chilled
Gravitating
Enchanted
Metamorphosed :

Patter
Plash...

Patter
Plash...

Patter
Plash...

Splash...

Splash.....

Splash.....

THE PILGRIM

I KNOW not
Whence came I.

I have met the sun
And stood the raging storm
Discussed with the noon-tide's nymphs
The birth of Birth and the death of Death.

I have sung an impassioned serenade
Under the gleam of summer moonshine
My eyes have penetrated
The iris-haze of mists and men.

The dusk has cast a gloom
On the boundless soundless sea
But what Unseen God has given me power
To turn darkness into eternal light ?

I hear an indistinct sound, an urgent word
A magic whisper from a far-off unknown land
I glide on like dust-particles floating in a sun-beam
To my rest in the endless haven they call sleep.

I know not
Whither I go.

THE POET'S CHALLENGE

TIME, you bold-faced robber
Blow your chill icy winds
Your blasting burning breath
Over my frail body.

Splash your gigantic tides
And drown the memories of men
Close their mirroring eyes
With lids of opaque stone.

Let my remembered name
Be locked in a devouring crater
Let the light of my beauty-drunk eyes
Be quenched in eternal ugliness.

Bury me deep, deep under
Death's ghastly night
Reduce my dancing bones
To threadbare rags
That no needy beggar may touch,
Transform my rhythmic blood
Into water soaked into the mire
That no thirsty dog may sip.

But remember my words, you Great One,
Young moon-bewitched maidens restless between
dusk and dawn
Widowed mothers anxiously awaiting their sons'
return from the field

Kings rolling uneasily in their downy beds
Youths wasting their vitality in drunken
midnight-revels

All these and many, many more souls
To be born in the timeless centuries of futurity
Will dip into my poetry for solace
Muse and rejoice and lose themselves
Enchanted by its lyric ecstasy,
But they will forget *you* the while.

BUILDING THE WORLD

I MET a peasant-girl
Maybe a twentyweek ago
In the wide furrowed field
Beside the steep grey hill.

She was scattering the new seed
On the ploughed land.

She eyed me closely
And smiled and ran to me
Said the dawn was
Passionate and young.

But she didn't want
To get older
Alone
And burn to ashes
Like the slow-decaying beams
Of the October sun...

We climbed the cliffs
To reach a modest wooden-house
Very neat and clean and cosy.

We ate and drank
Had bacon and bread and butter, and toast and tea
Made merry till the sun
Sank in the beating sea,

The night came on soon
I sat smoking in an arm-chair
The flowers were dallying
The winds blowing high and shrill
The brook babbling loud
As it ran down our hill.

Bewitching beauty has
Strange charm and
Stranger power
To charm.

"I am yours for the asking," she said
"Let us all go the ancient way
The way our forefathers trod.
The lily is only for the day
And so is youth, yours and mine
Give me the seed, the magic seed.
Let us make this night our most boisterous one
The most memorable.
Man is made
To dry a woman's tears
With his tongue and heart and handkerchief.
To quench her new-born hunger
With his comfortable touch,
Though transient is human life
This hour, this day, this mortal clay
This exquisite time will be recorded in heaven

As eternal in youth
And eternal in beauty's perfection
In the God's great scheme of things."

I held the lantern in my hand
And followed her speechlessly
Into the inner room.

She put out the light,
And we were plunged in a lampless darkness.

Below us beat the great sea
The western winds roared wildly
The bird's cage rocked gaily in the open window.

I am glad
A new fire is taking furtive birth and form
In her prolific body
Strong enough to light the earth
And set her laughing in the wind
And make her exultant and thankful.

Though I will return to her no more
I will dance in glee :
I have laboured in lighting one candle
To brighten this world.

Though I will not return to her any more
I will dance and dance and dance.

WHITHER ?

I SAW a flock of singing birds
Desert their new-made mating bowers
And rush forth suddenly from the grove of trees.

The tearing whistling North-wind
Whizzed through the ominous stillness
Driving the warblers to an unknown haven.

They flashed like a streak of lightning
Fluttered their silver wings like an oread's laughter
Away on the blue horizon.

They sped with a swiftness fleetier than Creation
gave them
Because their spirits were kindled with the heaven's
fire
But I know not where they live or lie !

GLIMPSE OF IMMORTALITY (1936)

ON the last Saturday of January last
At seven to five sharp
A star deserted its celestial company
And took birth in human shape :

A delicate rosy-cheeked girl*—
Sweet and most sublime.
Her language is
Ununderstood babble
Too deep for human understanding.
Her crystal eyes reflect:
The whole range of heaven's limitless wealth
Her little waving hands
Seem to be dropping hallowed flowers
And bring us blessings from the other world.

The singing birds come darting
To our eaves above the windows :

"You are a little angel
Flying with the flaming wings of dawn
Your palms contain infinity in them
And your laughter rocks the sky.

You are like a moon
That penetrates heavy clouds of mists
And appears to fainting travellers
A glowing ball of golden light.

You are like one
That knows not his own immortality."

Baby Mohini Naidu, the author's niece.

ARAB WOMAN

HER eyes are like
The big round setting sun
Her hair is long and sleek like silk
Dark like a desert night.
Her ruddy cheeks are
Soft like butter made from goats' milk.
Her curved chin
Like an orange in a cup
Her feet are fleet
Like the gazelle her menfolk hunt
Her smiling face is
An oasis in a long sea of endless burning sand.

She cooks all the meals herself
Washes her husband's feet
Clothes him
Brings him his hukka
Whets his weapons
Sings him to sleep
Her vigilance guards him
During the dark, uncertain Arabian nights..

In return
She receives
Devoted protection
Enough food
Enough work
Unremitting love
And a child every summer.

THE PIT

WE watch the skies
And look for sky-blue eyes.

We read Shakespeare's love-themes
And lie in wait for a likely maiden
To jump upon and romance with.

We visit the exciting talkies
And kiss a girl mechanically,
With our mechanical lips
We long for something beyond
Transcendent, unearthly—
In vain, it seems.

We dream of completeness
Harmony, union, perfection
And breast rests on breast,
Knee meets knee
Body supports body...

We only fall
Grope eternally
In darkness,
Struggle ceaselessly
In the bottomless abyss,
And burning in hell
We die.

Are reborn
Again to burn
And die...

Again.....

A POETRY READER

'T WAS the other day :

I was riding in a suburban train
A woman was seated in front of me
Buried in a daintily bound little volume.
Bold-coloured, warrior-like was her raiment
Her hair fashionably dressed
On her thin white wrists dangled four bangles
of gold
Her form was marvellous, it was a pleasure to look
at her.

She would have charmed kings
Owned palatial buildings
Driven in a silk-curtained Rolls-Royce ...

I could not see her face
I knew not whence came she
Or what her name was.

I only saw my name on the back of her book.
Maybe she will meet me again.

A WOMAN'S SONG

I AM the wet clay
You are the potter.

I am the water
You the pots, ponds and seas.

I am the notes
You the clear song.

I am the oil in a lamp
You the flame that kindles.

I am the four walls
You the dweller within.

I am you
You are I.

MY LOVE

MY love lived in a commercial city
Beside a great river
She worked from early morn
Till the day burned to its tip.
Every Saturday evening I met her
At the talkies
She would whisper into my ears
"I will soon share your room with you, my dear."

My neighbours said this evening
Her garment got entangled in a fly-wheel
She was dragged in and pulp made of her soft body.

Her dear sweet soothing words
"I will soon share your room with you, my dear"
Will charm me to-night
Into an everlasting sleep.

EVENING IN KHAR

BROODING shadows descend on the dapper model
village

Jewelled plumes of homing pigeons gleam in the
twilight sky

The young and fair and old are out to see and be seen
A whole phalanx perched on cement-seats at the
cross-roads.

The sea-breezes wake and whistle through the garden
trees

Scattering the serried leaves in a shower on the
pathways

Round the bend a young maid powders her face as
she walks

At the end of the street four bluff men push an old,
worn-out Ford.

WORKSHOP

THE din of giant wheels rolls and swells
A hundred hands move and jostle each other
Like a whizzing clanging engine gone out of control
Within a huge tinned tunnel protected from
sunlight.

The men sweat ceaselessly, their heads bent in
patient toil
Fighting a losing battle with up-to-date modern
machinery
While their master like a little guilty angel
Is busy taking his drive, dreaming, dreaming of build-
ing himself a house of gold.

TO-DAY'S MARKET VALUE

I SAW the same fat
giantesque thief-of-time
man daggerman highwayman
spinning in a fat motor-car
along twenty-nine vellards

his face shining
glittering a fragmentary
half-decaying broadening
disease of a smile

rushing to a bourne of
shifting minutes
no past no future
no memories only this
passing present

brain's an ever-revolving
disk attempting to corrode
dissolve the mighty
edifice built on steel structures
glittering hard-wrested gold
fabulous preposterous bank-balances
great hopes banked treasured
for prolific progeny to come.

'I'd go to Illinois (says he)
escape the fever the brain-fag
drive a donkey taxi
or row on the Suez Canal

the blithe swarthy sprites
of raped Ethiopia
no I don't want
no wrist-watch
I—I—I
you you you
are a
democrat—no ?—democrat
dae moe craat
I am then a
man
I mean the
peoples' man ...

What ? Mosco ?
Damn you for it
don't you talk no more
to me of your mosco
the fire is red already
and my eye is red
and my blood is red
red florid red
like red
I am no Spanish bull
am I ? You tell me
a man I am
a man
man of men.
not God's.

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